



**GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC) DISASTER PREPAREDNESS
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EXCOM) MEETING
16-17 MARCH 2004**

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Common Ground

Man-made and natural disasters continue to be threats in this region and ongoing cooperation in responding to these disasters remains a matter of regional importance. Representatives from all nations of the Persian Gulf should discuss how the military could more effectively address the issues of disaster preparedness and better coordinate support to civil authorities. Additionally, coordination and dialogue concerning disaster preparedness and environmental security are non-contentious and comparatively free of political conflict from one country to the next. Therefore, the GCC Council Disaster Preparedness Committee can achieve real progress in developing and coordinating ways to deal with disaster preparedness.

With the goals of enhancing environmental cooperation between defense and environmental authorities in the region, and examining opportunities for multi-lateral and inter-agency cooperation, the U. S. Central Command and the Bahrain Defense Force co-sponsored the Executive Committee for Disaster Preparedness in Manama, Bahrain, with the coordinated efforts of the Office of the Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Installations and the Environment, the Near East-South Asia Center of the National Defense University and the U. S. Army War College Center for Strategic Leadership. Key military and civilian leaders from Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates also participated in this second meeting of the Executive Committee. The objectives of this meeting were to –

- Discuss a proposed 5-year disaster preparedness strategy for the region, and
- Start developing the next Disaster Preparedness Conference to be held in Manama, Bahrain 27-29 September 2004.

The first such event was a seminar in April 2000 conference in Muscat, Oman, which set the stage for recent conferences. Some of the recommendations from the Oman seminar included establishing a regional monitoring and warning center to help coordinate relief efforts, inviting civilian authorities to future seminars, and exchanging training expertise and support the preservation of environmental technologies. All participants clearly understood

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that disasters do not respect national borders, that one country does not have all the resources to handle large disasters, and that civil-military cooperation is needed because disasters affect the whole population. For that reason, developing regional cooperation is crucial. The second event took place in Doha, Qatar, in September 2002 to define regional threats. Such threats included oil spills, WMD, hazardous materials/toxic chemical accidents, and petrochemical infrastructure incidents. Another major discussion involved establishment of a regional response coordination center. The most recent event was the EXCOM session in Mesaieed, Qatar, in October 2003. Some significant discussions occurred such as the military's role in supporting civil authorities leading response efforts, and the continued significance of regional threats (petroleum business, terrorists, WMD). Two major items discussed at the meeting were regional training and the regional cooperation center.

A Preparedness Strategy

The members of the Executive Committee discussed a proposal for a 5-year disaster preparedness strategy for the Gulf, including a regional response coordination mechanism. Through this strategy, the Committee intends to promote regional stability and enhance national and regional capabilities through a robust engagement program of civil-military conferences, exercises, and integration activities; and to support regional cooperation and interoperability through the development of a Regional Disaster Preparedness Coordination Center. The end state of the strategy is regional stability, improved interoperability, and increased self-reliance. Achieving that end state through the development of regional disaster preparedness coordination procedures and/or a regional center depends on local requirements. The most likely threats are: 1) terrorist attacks on infrastructure using high yield explosives; 2) natural disasters; 3) man-made or accidental disasters such as chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attacks, toxic industrial chemicals/toxic industrial materials effects, and infrastructure or environmental related disasters. The near-term focus should be on regional cooperation procedures and agreements because the GCC members face practically the same threats. Therefore, development of regional procedures is a worthwhile first effort. While developing regional procedures, the group could focus on standardized response structures and on clearly defining the types of disasters within the scope of effort.

The Road Ahead

CENTCOM representatives proposed objectives for the September conference are —

- gaining consensus for the 5-year strategy,
- strengthening the framework for managing man-made and natural disasters,
- identifying regional resources for the prevention and mitigation of terrorism, the trafficking of WMD, man-made and natural disasters, medical surveillance and early warning, and
- managing the consequences of disasters.

The 3-day event will include large-group plenary sessions and small-group focus groups to enhance discussion. The Bahrain Defense Force and CENTCOM agreed that each session and focus group would have a regional chairman and a U.S. special advisor. Topics for the briefing may include the interaction between the ministries and responsibilities at various levels - which issues are handled at the national (strategic) level, which issues are handled at the senior management (operational) level, and which issues are handled the tactical (responder) level. A regional training program proposal could be presented as well as a proposed database for regional information

sharing. Those two elements are important not only for minimizing disaster events but for being part of the prevention process too. The database could be developed along two paths – one for the military and one for other government ministries and non-government agencies or private companies.

Conclusion

Environmental cooperation promotes overall regional stability and strengthens military and civilian relationships. Participation in discussions will help to enhance the military's role as promoters of national stewardship among the national of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

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